

Message Text

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15

ACTION EA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, TH

SUBJ: METROPOLITAN ELECTRICTY AUTHORITY STRIKE AVERTED

SUMMARY: A LONG SMOLDERING LABOR DISPUTE FLARED ANEW AS SEVERAL THOUSAND EMPLOYEES OF THE METROPOLITAN ELECTRICITY AUTHORITY (MEA) WALKED OFF THE JOB TO RENEW DEMANDS MADE IN AN EARLIER WALKOUT. INTERVENTION BY LABOR DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS BROKE AN IMPASSE AND GAVE LABOR A FAVORABLE SETTLEMENT.

2. ON JULY 7, 1975, LEADERS OF THE 6,000 MEMBER MEA EMPLOYEES UNION SUBMITTED NINE DEMANDS RANGING FROM FREE TUITION FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN TO INCREASED SALARIES AND PENSIONS. THE DEMANDS WERE SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE LABOR RELATIONS ACT AND THREE NEGOTIATING SESSIONS WERE HELD BETWEEN 11 AND 18 JULY. WITH THE BREADOWN OF NEGOTIATIONS RHETORIC BECAME HEATED BUT UNION LEADERS INSISTED THAT THEY WOULD NOT DISRUPT POWER DISTRIBUTION. MONDAY DURING A SEVEN HOUR MEETING, MEA MANAGER LEK SAOWANAYON, MEA EMPLOYEES' UNION PRESIDENT PHAISAN THAWATCHAINAN, AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE LABOR DEPARTMENT NIKHOM CHANTHARAWITHUN REACHED AN AGREEMENT GIVING ALL WORKERS A RAISE OF 100-150 BAHT PER MONTH, ESTABLISHING 200 SCHOLARSHIPS WORTH 2,000 BAHT EACH FOR DEPENDENTS, PUTTING ALL DAY LABORERS ON THE MONTHLY PAYROLL, AND ADJUSTING PAY SCALES TO REFLECT THE EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

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OF THE EMPLOYEE. UNDER THE LAST PROVISION, A HOLDER OF A 4-

YEAR UNIVERSITY DEGREE WILL RECEIVE 1850 BAHT PER MONTH WHILE THE LOWEST PAID UNSKILLED EMPLOYEE WILL RECEIVE 750 BAHT PER MONTH. THE ISSUE OF HOW TO COMPUTE SEVERANCE PAY AND RETIREMENT PENSIONS WILL BE RESOLVED IN THE LAW COURTS.

3. IN A RELATED SERIES OF ACTIONS OTHER PUBLIC ENTERPRISE UNIONS, INCLUDING THE RAILWAY WORKERS VOTED TO SUPPORT MEA EMPLOYEES, IF THEY WERE UNABLE TO REACH A SETTLEMENT.

4. COMMENT: THE FACT THAT ONE OF THE BETTER ORGANIZED UNIONS WAS ABLE TO REACH A QUICK AND GENEROUS SETTLEMENT WITH MANAGEMENT OF A VITAL PUBLIC ENTERPRISE POINTS OUT THE ADVANTAGES OF SOUND ORGANIZATION AND MATURE LEADERSHIP. HOWEVER, THE RULES OF THE GAME ARE FAR DIFFERENT FROM THAT PLAYED BY SMALLER LESS ESTABLISHED UNIONS AND PROFIT-SEEKING PRIVATE CONCERNS. COOPERATION AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE UNIONS WILL CONTINUE, MUCH TO THE BENEFIT OF THE EMPLOYEES. THEIR WILLINGNESS TO SUPPORT THE SMALL UNIONS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS DOUBTFUL; PARADOXICALLY THE FAVORABLE SETTLEMENT AND EXPRESSIONS OF SOLIDARITY TEND TO POLARIZE THE THAI LABOR MOVEMENT. THE GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE UNIONS HAVE THE CLOUT TO SUCCEED, WHERE THE PRIVATE SECTOR UNIONS FREQUENTLY SUFFER FROM POOR LEADERSHIP AND LIMITED FINANCING. THE EXISTING LABOR RELATIONS ACT WAS FURTHER UNDERMINED BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE LABOR DEPARTMENT HIMSELF. RATHER THAN GOING THROUGH THE PRESCRIBED MEDIATION PROCEDURES, HE WORKED OUT A DEAL PRIVATELY WITH THE UNION PRESIDENT AND THE MEA.

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